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WHY DID JESUS DIE?

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Friendly Words to Educated Natives.

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“He saved others, himself he cannot save.”

No one that knows any thing of history will deny that the occasion on which these words were spoken, has been more pregnant of results than any other event of which mention is made in history. Will it not be profitable to us to consider when and where these words were spoken; by whom they were spoken; with reference to whom; their true significance?

They were spoken about 1850 years ago outside the walls of Jerusalem, by the chief priests of the Jewish religion. It is a place of execution, and rising considerably above the large crowd are three men hanging upon crosses. Death by crucifixion was the penalty assigned by the Romans to those who were convicted of capital crimes; but all Roman citizens

were exempt from it, whatever their crime; it was reserved for slaves and for foreign captives. We thus at once perceive that it was a more ignominious form of punishment than death by the gallows, the penalty for capital crimes imposed by English law; for under that law citizenship does not save men from this penalty. In front of these three crucified persons, is a large crowd, consisting not merely of the rabble that form the principal elements in the crowds that ordinarily witness public executions, but embracing representatives of all classes of the community. Yes, even the highest. The Jews had a religion for which, in its essential features, they claimed a primeval origin, and for that which related specially to their nation they claimed an antiquity of fifteen centuries. Their high-priest was the visible head of their religious commonwealth, and in a certain sense represented God himself. For their national system was originally a theocracy, a government ruled by God himself. The office of the high-priest was at first for life; but in the days of which we speak

the office had become a place of worldly honour and influence sought for by ambitious and contentious persons, and the term of office was for a year only. Consequently, at any moment there might be found in Jerusalem not only the high-priest of the current year but those who had filled the office in previous years and who by courtesy were still known as high-priests. So we have mention of the high-priests, in the plural, as coming to look upon the strange spectacle that was that day to be witnessed at Golgotha, the place of execution outside of the walls of Jerusalem. As these distinguished persons drew nigh, followed by the elders and scribes, there was a sensation in the crowd; men fell back to make way for them and allow them to come near the crosses, and lowly salutations were made to them. On two of the crosses malefactors were hanging. These were persons who had been engaged in highway robbery, and had been arrested by the Roman officials engaged in putting down this form of lawlessness, and had been tried and condemned to death.

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Their sentences were written over their heads. It was not for the purpose of witnessing the execution of the law's sentence upon these persons that the high-priests came forth from their palaces in Jerusalem. It was on account of the one who was hanging between these two robbers that they had come. On the central cross it had been the intention of the authorities to execute a man named Barabbas, who had been guilty of murder and of trying to bring about an insurrection ; a man, in fact, guilty of treason, the most notorious criminal in Jerusalem. But it was the custom of the Jews at the Passover feast to ask the release of some prisoner. Well, Barabbas had been released and another person, at the instance of the high priests, and others whom they had persuaded to join them in making the request, had been condemned to die in his place. Over the head of the central figure was written "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Fixing their eyes upon him the high-priests said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save."

Who was this person who saved others but could not save himself? What did they mean by saving He saved others? Had he really saved any body? From what had he saved them? Well, we will glance at something that he did about two months before the time of this crucifixion. It occurred in the immediate neighbourhood of Jerusalem and had been very much talked of in that city. It occurred in Bethany, just over the brow of yonder hill facing Jerusalem on the east. There was a family for whom Jesus of Nazareth had a great affection. There was Lazarus with his two sisters, Martha and Mary, pious, God-fearing and held in high respect by all who knew them. Lazarus fell ill. Jesus was at some distance, but the sisters despatched a message to him thus worded: He whom thou lovest is sick. They had such persuasion of the friendliness of Jesus that they were sure he would come to them as soon as he heard that Lazarus was ill. But why send for Jesus? Was he a physician? No; and very likely their neighbours thought

they would have done better to send for a physician. But the fact that they sought for Jesus showed they believed that he had power to restore their brother. They were greatly disappointed when day after day went by without bringing Jesus to the bedside of the dying one. Their brother died. It seemed a great mystery that Jesus had not come or even sent any message. Their brother was laid away in the sepulchre. Many of their friends in Jerusalem came to sympathize with them over their great sorrow. Finally, four days after the burial, Jesus came. Martha received word that he was at the outskirts of the village, and went forth to meet him. She fell at his feet, exclaiming with great bitterness of feeling, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. Afterwards Mary came and said the same thing. They had not the slightest doubt of the ability of Jesus to save their brother from dying, but could not tell why he had neglected to come and do it. Jesus enquired where they had laid him, and they went with him to the place,

many of their friends and others accompanying them. There, Jesus commanded the stone to be removed from the face of the sepulchre, and then cried out, "Lazarus, come forth." The one who had been dead four days, came forth alive, and returned with his sisters to their house, while Jesus and his disciples went again to the part of the country in which the message had reached them. The news of this went abroad in the capital and numbers came out day by day to see him who had been so marvellously raised from the dead. It was specially because of the effect produced upon the community by this act that the priests made up their minds to leave no stone unturned to compass the death of Jesus. Well, this is a specimen of the works wrought by Jesus which caused the chief priests to say to him, as he hung upon the cross, He saved others, himself he cannot save. Certainly nothing could exhibit a greater contrast than the scene presented at the grave of Lazarus, and that presented here in Golgotha to-day. On the one occasion we see

the sublimest exercise of power ; on the other we see what seems to be the perfection of weakness. The nails driven through the palms of his hands and through his feet, fasten Jesus to the cross just as effectually as those that pierce the hands and feet of the malefactors fasten them.

We may give another illustration of the way in which this crucified person had been accustomed to save others. He once landed in the country of Gadara, in the neighborhood of Gergesa, a city on the south east border of the Lake of Galilee. Living among the tombs outside of that city was a man who might be described as a wreck of humanity. He was possessed of devils ; he hated society ; he hated all men ; he hated himself. It was dangerous to pass the place where he was ; he would fiercely attack any one who ventured to do so. Sometimes he would lacerate himself with stones. At times the authorities had seized him and bound him ; but he always succeeded in breaking their bonds and getting back to his den. This man descried Jesus at a distance, and

running to him, fell at his feet, recognizing him as the Son of God, and at the same time beseeching him to depart and leave him alone. Jesus spoke to the evil spirit that dwelt in him and compelled it to go out of the man. A wonderful change was immediately witnessed. The man was henceforth another man altogether. He drank in the instructions of Christ and found a happiness in serving others that he had never known when he was the enemy of every body. He wished to follow Christ on his return voyage over the lake but when directed to go rather to his friends and let them know what had been done for him he cheerfully acquiesced. He was a new creature and all things appeared new to him. Love, joy and peace possessed him instead of gloom and misanthropy and ferocity, and all that saw him wondered at the transformation effected in him. The great problem of modern society is how to reclaim the dangerous classes; the word of Christ can do it and nothing else can. Thus during some years Jesus of Nazareth had been going about

the country, succouring the poor and needy, the blind, deaf, lame, sick, possessed; cleansing lepers, raising the dead; nor was it necessary that they who sought his aid, should be recommended to him by their good qualities, or by the voice of society; he healed all who sought his aid, casting out none. The report of these things had gone abroad among the neighboring nations and many afflicted persons were brought to him from those foreign countries and he invariably healed them. He never sought his own pleasure; often, in his travels, he had not where to lay his head; his companions were fishermen and persons of like humble grade, so that his fare was always simple.

He saved others, not himself. Thus it was throughout his life. He was always intent on promoting the welfare of others, and gladly sacrificed his ease and comfort and safety that he might aid others. He constantly embodied this principle in the instructions given to his disciples. He told them to seek to be last of all and servants of all, and to deny themselves in

order that they might come to the assistance of the poor and friendless. The postponement of self, the preference of others was not only inculcated by precept but by example. On a certain occasion he had washed the feet of his disciples that that they might learn to sacrifice their own convenience in favour of that of their neighbour. Throughout his ministry he had had to encounter the hatred of those who were rebuked by his holy life and teachings, and who were conscious that if his cause were to prevail their own repute would be destroyed. Yet Jesus had never once exerted his wondrous power to injure them. Many had taken up stones to throw at him, but he never struck any body with blindness or any other ailment. He had driven certain traffickers from one of the courts of the temple ; but this was through zeal for the house of God desecrated by them. The court was the court of the Gentiles, and the Jews showed their contempt for other nations (Gentiles) by allowing this court to be turned into a kind of bazaar.

Jesus showed by his single-handed procedure that he rose quite above the prejudices of the Jews, and rejoiced in the divine purpose to bring all nations to the platform of a common religion. He saved others, not himself. Yes, all that knew him would testify that this had always been his characteristic. Self-sacrifice for the good of others was stamped on the entire history of his earthly career.

At the very onset of his public labours he went into the wilderness and was there tempted of the devil, or tested with regard to this very point, the use that he would make of his divine powers. Will he use them to promote in any way his own ends? Will he use them to promote the convenience of himself or his disciples? Will he use them to establish the kingdom of God on earth by means of worldly devices? It was made evident that he would not.

But is it true that he cannot save himself? In one sense it is true; in another it is not true. The night before his crucifixion he reproved one of his dis-

ciples for using the sword and said, "Thinkest thou that I cannot pray to my Father and he will give me twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled?" He could have arrayed himself in a celestial power that would have awed his enemies, but not without contravening the Scriptures. That he could not do, because he loved God and man too well to do it.

If he had saved himself, he could not have been the Saviour of others. Because he was fully-minded to accomplish the salvation of others, he could not save himself. It would have been a very small thing for him with the powers that he was daily exercising, to expel the Romans from Judea and establish an independent kingdom, and rule it in such a way as to secure the homage and adhesion of other nations, and give the world the spectacle of an empire such as they had not dreamed of. But he knew well that the salvation needed by man, was not merely political. 'The kingdom of God is within you,' he said once to his disciples. He had saved Lazarus

from death, and the Gadarene from frightful mental disorder; but if he had left them to meet the penalty due for sin, and carve out for themselves a way to glory, honour and immortality, the works wrought on them would have been of little consequence. He came into the world to secure for sinners that which could not be secured by any exercise of mere power. Men idolize power and need to be delivered from this idolatry, and in order that he might save men in the truest sense it was necessary that he should abnegate his power and consent to be weaker than the weakest. 'He was crucified through weakness,' says the Apostle Paul. Through weakness voluntarily assumed.

Would you not think it extraordinary if while Jesus of Nazareth is actually undergoing this ignominious punishment and dying on the cross at the instance of the Jewish authorities and by the command of the Roman Governor, and while the meanest or the bitterest of all who look upon him are emboldened to mock him and taunt him, he should actually be

the Saviour of a dying malefactor? Save thyself and us, said to him one of those who were crucified with him; but he said it deridingly; meaning, If thou hast any of thy former power, release thyself and us from the crosses on which we are suffering. But the other malefactor reprovod his companion and acknowledged that they two were suffering the just recompense of their deeds, but affirmed that Jesus was innocent. This poor man hearing Christ pray for his enemies, and noting the serenity and victorious patience with which he met every thing that came to him, was profoundly convinced that he must indeed be what he claimed to be, the Messiah, and said unto him, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." His faith rose superior to all the humiliations of the hour, and though he could not perhaps say why this innocent person so meekly gave himself to this cruel death, he yet felt in his own heart that this Crucified One was really mightier than all who were heaping their insults upon him. He believed that this

was he of whom David spoke in the second Psalm : " Kings and rulers set themselves against the Lord and against his Anointed, (the Messiah,) saying, Let us break their bonds asunder. But the Lord said, 'Thou art my Son, my King upon the holy hill of Zion.'" He judged not according to the appearances. Faith enabled him to see that there might be a manifestation of God in meekness and lowliness and sacrifice, as well as in mere power. Jesus said unto him, This day thou shalt be with me in paradise. Here the crucified and taunted Jesus expresses a conviction not merely that he would himself be that day in the paradise of God, but that he would save and take with him to glory this poor penitent malefactor. Thus, we find him engaged in saving others up to the closing moments of his life. But some reader will say that to utter the words is easy, but what proof is there that the words had any potency? Well, if you consider it carefully, the probabilities are altogether in favour of the assumption that he spoke what was true.

He had been for years holding intercourse with men, and not one of them had been able to bring home to him any instance of a deviation from the truth. He once said to a man who had a withered arm, Stretch forth thy hand, and he immediately stretched it forth. On one occasion he spoke to the winds and the waves when a tempest was raging, and immediately there was a great calm. He told some unsuccessful fishermen to cast on the right hand of the vessel, and a great multitude of fish were enclosed. He told ten lepers to go and show themselves as cleansed to the priest, and while they were on their way they were restored perfectly. On one occasion he said to a paralytic, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee; and when some expressed a doubt of the validity of such words, he added, Take up thy bed and walk; and the man was at once healed, took up his bed and walked. A nobleman whose son was ill, sought the aid of Jesus and received an assurance that his son was restored. When the nobleman reached his house the day after,

he found that restoration had taken place just at the moment when Christ had said it. Only three days before his crucifixion, his word had caused a fig-tree to wither away. Is it reasonable to suppose that one whose word had always made its way to accomplishment even through the most astounding difficulties, would now utter a word for which there was no fulfilment? All things considered, the probabilities are immensely in favour of the truth of this word spoken on the cross.

A little time before his death this Jesus had been notified by one of his disciples that some Greeks had expressed a desire to see him. He saw fit to regard this as an indication that the time had come when he must lay down his life in order that distant nations like the Greeks should have the opportunity of hearing of the divine method of salvation. So he said to his disciples, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." A

little after he said: "Now is my son troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. I, if I be lifted up shall draw all men unto me." John xii. 20, 32. He all along knew perfectly well just where the path he was treading would bring him on. In his public discourses Jesus had spoken of himself as the good Shepherd giving his life for the sheep.

He saved not himself; having the power to do so, he did it not. He re-proved his disciples for using the sword when the men came to take him, and healed the man whose ear had been cut off by Peter. How then, he said, shall the Scriptures be fulfilled? The Scriptures required that the Saviour of men should consent to lose his own life. He could not save himself without contravening the Scriptures. We must now consider why the Scriptures condition the salvation of man upon the self-sacrifice of the Saviour. Why could he not save

men from their sins as he saved them from their physical diseases? Well, this we now hope to show.

Himself he cannot save because he is under the constraining influence of divine love, leading him to choose suffering for himself rather than others. This love would well deserve our attention even if those whom it sought to benefit were of equal merit with the one who sacrifices himself to do them good. But in the case of Jesus of Nazareth how very different is the case. The one who suffers is the one who is singled out from all mankind by God, when a voice came from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And they for whom he suffers are sinners capable even of such portentous crime as that of crucifying the sinless Son of God.

Let us seek to understand what was really the nature of the sufferings undergone by Jesus of Nazareth and what it was that made them effectual for the salvation of sinners.

1 From the beginning he knew that his life was to go ont under the great eclipse of the cross. From the beginning he saw that his earthly pilgrimage was to bring him to this mighty opprobrium. Wherever he was he saw the cross looming in the distancc, waiting for him. When multitudes were desirous of making him a king, when shouts of Hosanna to the Son of God were sounding about him, when he was subduing the tempest and raising the dead, he still saw the dark and terrible object before him. However much human bigotry and hatred might cower before him and seek to hide itself from his gaze, he knew that there was a place of triumph in reserve for his enemies. How could he be other than a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, with this awful and crushing defeat in reserve for his last moments? As often as he was called to put forth his divine power in alleviating the wants and woes of men, he could not but reflect that a time was coming when it would be necessary not only to forego the exercise

of this power but to go down in defencelessness below the very weakest of mankind. He taught his disciples to resist not evil, well knowing that the principle would have its most fearful ordeal in himself.

2 He loved his disciples, and gave himself for years to the great work of educating them to follow him. They were to be his agents in the work of carrying out the Gospel scheme and extending salvation to the world, and every thing depended on their faith. As when a steamer has in tow a wrecked vessel, which she is taking to a safe harbour; every thing depends upon the cable by which the wreck is made fast to the steamer. Jesus saw that his disciples had faith in him when they saw him exercising authority over the powers of darkness and redeeming men from all manner of sickness and calamities; but he all along knew that his disciples would see him at length the weakest of the weak as regards the manifestation of his power; and what could he anticipate

but that their faith would utterly give way, and sweep them back into the power of the world ?

3. "He came unto his own and his own received him not." He came to the people that had been specially prepared by their Scriptures for the advent of a Messiah, and he found them utterly unwilling to receive him because he would not exert his power in a way to deliver them from the humiliating yoke of the Romans and invest them with that national distinction and grandeur which their pride and ambition made them desire. He saw the great mass of the people in whose sight his wonderful miracles had been performed, still disposed to follow the Pharisees and other religious leaders at Jerusalem ; deferring more to the bitter enemies of Christ than to him. They who should have been the foremost to receive him, denounced him as an impostor and showed plainly that they used religion as a means of personal aggrandizement. Jesus knew that in him was the fulness of the Godhead and that the image of the

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living God was displayed in him ; yet he saw the people who were loudest in their declaration of devotion to God, rejecting the image of God thus placed before their eyes, and charging him with being in partnership with Beelzebub, prince of devils. This was a formidable test of his love to the souls of men. How shall he continue to take an interest in those who exhibit under such loathsome characteristics the humanity he came to save ? And it was especially at the cross that man exhibited in perfection the ugliness and diabolism of his nature. How marvellous the love that could stand this ordeal ! Come we to the closing hours of the life of Christ in the flesh. Behold him in the garden of Gethsemane, on the night of his arrest, the night before his execution. Withdrawing from his disciples a short distance he knelt down and prayed earnestly that if it were possible a certain cup of sorrow might pass from him ; at the same time saying that he was willing to drink it if it were the Father's will. He had told his disciples that his arrest and

execution were about to take place, and was most anxious that their faith might not utterly fail under these appalling circumstances. They could not believe that he was actually going to be divested of his power to confound his enemies, and were disposed to go to sleep. Jesus again and again breaks off from praying that he may see how it fares with his disciples, but is unspeakably distressed by finding them asleep. On this occasion Jesus said, my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; words that give us some faint idea of the mighty struggle through which he was passing. Afterwards his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood from a wounded man on the field of battle. Then the soldiers came and he allowed them to bind his hands and lead him away. The minds of the apostles were confounded and overwhelmed and they took to flight. He is then taken to the high-priest's house and is there insulted and struck not by the high-priest merely but by his servants. They make sport of him and of

his pretensions, and at break of day lead him to the palace of the Roman Governor where he undergoes, (as afterwards in the palace of King Herod) the contemptible and studied mockery of the soldiery and of the servants. He is scourged, an awful infliction for one so physically wan and weak and faint as he was. When the cross was put upon his shoulder that he might bear it to the appointed place, he staggered under it. Finally he is taken to the place of crucifixion, and there upon the central cross, he is crucified between two robbers who had forfeited their lives by their deeds of outlawry. It is in this kind of company that Jesus is compelled by men to take his last look at mortal life. Looking down from the cross upon the sea of heads spread out before him, men and women gathered together from all parts in connection with the Jewish feast of the Passover, Jesus describes a little handful of his disciples, at first on the outskirts of the crowd, but afterwards timidly drawing a little nearer to him. He knows well what is going on in their

minds. He knows that they are utterly bewildered, and completely at a loss to explain his apparent helplessness, and unable to deny that God in his providence seems to be acknowledging the correctness of the Pharisees' view of Jesus. This was the agony of agonies; that the truth itself seemed to be crucified with him, and the false guides of the people appeared to be fully vindicated for all the opposition shown him. Love identifies itself with its object and suffers with it. Love dwelt in Christ in perfection and accordingly he suffered with his disciples and with the truth that was so unspeakably dear to him. Finally there came a moment when he was without the sense of the light of his Father's countenance which had always sustained him, and he cries out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? They among the crowd that knew the meaning of the words used by him, would naturally say, 'This is a conclusive proof that he is indeed an impostor. In this supreme moment of his punishment he is made to bear testimony against himself;

doubtless he is a prey to remorse and sees the sinfulness of the course pursued by him.' And Jesus knew perfectly that such would be the inference drawn by them. He was made a curse for us; in order that we might be delivered from the curse which sin entails, he took our place, and God dealt with our sin and guilt in him. This season of abandonment passes away. Before he closes his eyes in death we hear the crucified One cry out, Father, into thine hands I commit my spirit.

It is reported of a distinguished man of modern times, that his last words, uttered on his dying bed, were an aspiration for 'more light.' It is nevertheless a truth, that men in general have a great deal more light than they care to use. Almost every man's knowledge is in advance of his practice. He may be more or less governed by a sense of obligation, but he is in too many things governed rather by his inclinations. Men fail, not because their minds are not enlightened, but because their hearts are not disposed

rightly. In almost all systems very much excellent instruction may be found, well fitted, if obeyed, to elevate and purify society. In the *Vidoor Niti* and other Hindu books there may be found what would go far to constitute a good ethical system. It is one thing, however to advise men, a very different thing to get them to follow the advice. Man is like a cripple far from home ; he does not merely need to know the way that leads homeward, but needs to be made whole that he may travel thither. It is very evident that men instead of being under the influence of a law which leads them to save others at the sacrifice of their own interests, are under the influence of a law which moves them to sacrifice the interests of others to what they think their own. The problem that religion has to solve is this, *how to overcome the selfishness of men and create in them a spirit of self-sacrifice?* The cross of Christ is the answer to this question and we know of none other. They who seek salvation at the cross of Christ, learn that salvation consists preeminently in

being saved from one's selfishness, and made like to him who saved not himself but others. Surely, no observant and thoughtful enquirer can deny that the fact of receiving salvation through the self-sacrifice of the best and worthiest of beings, is fitted to pluck up selfishness by the roots. It is human selfishness that is found crucifying the Son of God, and at the cross of Christ we see it in its greatest deformity. The apostle Paul speaks of the cross of Christ as the power of God unto salvation. This is strange language to use in speaking of that which seems to be a singular display of weakness, but Paul could use it confidently because all that knew any thing about the change accomplished in himself, knew that there had been a mighty display of divine power in the transformation of his character. He that had been conspicuous for his detestation of the name of Christ and of those who gloried in it, became distinguished for the sufferings he cheerfully encountered in every place at the hands of those who hated Christ.

For thirty years he ran the gauntlet of all the outrages and injuries that men might heap upon him, and his love to Christ and to mankind only burned the brighter. It was not the throne of glory on which he suddenly found Christ to be seated, that day when he was approaching the gates of Damascus, that wrought this mighty change in him : but it was the fact then made evident to him that Jesus who suffered death under Pontius Pilate on the cross near Jerusalem was the Messiah, the chosen of God. He told the Corinthians that he was determined to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and him crucified. He was five times publicly scourged, thrice beaten with rods, he was stoned and left for dead, he was often mobbed, a score of times he was brought before magistrates and rulers, he spent at least five years of his ministry in prison, on one occasion forty men bound themselves by solemn oath not to eat until they had taken his life, yet all this did not in the least extinguish his ardour in preaching and exemplify-

ing the Gospel. The only thing that men could allege against him was that he preached salvation through the cross of Christ, by faith in him who could not save himself but others. After thirty years of such a life (comparable to a chain in which every link is a death,) he, writing to the Philippians, says "I count all things but loss, (regard them as worthless) that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is by the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness of God by faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death." iii. 9,10. And Paul was only one out of thousands and tens of thousands who willingly exposed themselves to the severest persecution in the endeavour to save their fellowmen from the chains of superstition and misbelief. Is it any wonder? What other result could be anticipated when men were brought to view the cross of Christ as the expression of divine love

for a sinful race? Yes, the cross of Christ is the power of God to every one that believeth, whether Jew or Gentile, European or Asiatic. Its tendency is to transform the character of those who look to it in faith ; to infuse into the beholder the same spirit of self sacrifice that was exemplified in Christ. If this is its tendency, then is it not sufficiently evident that this is that exhibition of the grace and power of God that is needed ?

